

CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

WALTER M. DICKIE, M.D., Director

Weekly Bulletin



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GUY P. JONES
EDITOR

Cancer From a Public Health Point of View

Dr. Haven Emerson, Professor of Public Health Administration at Columbia University is recognized as one of the foremost vital statisticians in the United States. He has recently prepared a lecture for the American Society for the Control of Cancer, in which he makes an important evaluation of cancer from the standpoint of public health. While his point of view is designed to overcome fear of cancer, his approach to the discussion is from a statistical angle, and is worthy of careful reading. In this lecture Dr. Emerson states:

"The modern family is less concerned with a possible spiritual immortality, and more curious about its present troubles and joys than with threats of death or of purgatory afterwards.

"We have been surfeited with scientific miracles, and the unbelievable promises of the billboard and poster ads should no longer deceive the thoughtful house-keeper as to the health values of foods and drugs.

"The physician in his office or hospital ward and his fellow practitioner in the health department serve as general question boxes into which an infinite variety of probable and improbable inquiries are dropped in person or by proxy by those who have already lost their health, or fear they may, and are eager to keep it or regain it.

"Whether in the consultation room or in public meetings few questions recur more frequently than those dealing with the likelihood or hazard of cancer. This is in large part because the publicity in the past twenty years has aroused an honest curiosity about cancer, without always offering entirely satisfactory advice on prevention.

"Could my child have cancer? When must I watch for signs of cancer in myself, and where upon my body? Will my mother have cancer because her grandfather died of it? How can I be sure that the cancer I have been cured of will not return somewhere else? Is cancer increasing and why? Can I prevent cancer by dieting, or by moving out of the city? Will my husband develop cancer if he continues in his present work, drinks hard liquor, or smokes a pipe?

"These questions and many like them reveal the uncertainty that breeds fear, which, if not satisfied, will disturb peace of mind and develop an unreasonable anxiety, until the person has become to some degree mentally abnormal, or quite unreasonable in his worry.

"Answers, truthful and helpful, can be given to such gropings for fact and comfort, even if our knowledge is not yet all inclusive in regard to each individual situation.

"Let us see this problem whole and in proportion to others of the hazards of life.

"To begin with, of all deaths occurring in the United States in a year only one in ten is from cancer. More than twice as many persons die of heart disease as of cancer. And more deaths occur from infectious and parasitic diseases than from cancer, and almost as many from violence as from cancer.

"And furthermore, there is no occasion for everyone to carry the threat of cancer about with them as if it were a constant universal menace, because only a fraction of our people have reached those ages in which cancer is at all frequent.

"Among almost fifty million persons under twenty years of age, not more than one in 25,000 dies in a year from cancer; and of the twenty-five million

children under ten years of age less than one per cent of the deaths among them are due to cancer.

"There are so many other ever present threats to life for children and young men and women in their first two decades, such as tuberculosis and pneumonia and the accidents of play and traffic that no parents need carry cancer in their minds as a hazard to the child. With less than a thousand deaths from cancer in children under ten, and over thirty-two thousand due to tuberculosis and heart disease and pneumonia and accidents, at least for young children and their parents, cancer need not be a common cause of fear.

"Among persons under twenty, 61,410 die each year of tuberculosis, pneumonia and accidents, and less than 2000 from cancer.

"Even among all the eighty million people in the United States under thirty-five years of age, less than 5 per cent of all cancer deaths occur. These eighty million people can not help themselves by fearing cancer.

"There are, however, periods of life when thoughtful folks must pay attention to the chance of cancer, whether they be men or women, married or single, and of any race, or occupation, or income level.

"Ninety-five per cent of all cancer occurs in persons over thirty-five years of age, i.e., cancer is a hazard which concerns particularly about one-third of the total population of the United States. This means that there are some forty-six million people in our country who must take thought of the conditions of their bodies and their way of life to make sure that what we do know about cancer is not wasted by neglect. It is the immediate intention of the physicians and health officers of our country to see that the men and women of these ages, over thirty-five, know what to do and when, to reduce the likelihood of cancer, and to prevent death from it by prompt treatment if it should develop.

"But, you will ask me, why, if the sanitary code, the health law of each state or city can forbid raw milk to prevent tuberculosis, and health departments exercise control over water supply to prevent typhoid, can not some law be passed by the enforcement of which we can be spared loss from cancer?

"To this we must answer, No! Cancer occurs in many different parts of the body, and although in general from some persistent or repeated local irritation, the particular cause in all instances is not known, but we know certainly that it is not an infectious or communicable or inherited disease. This is but one of the many instances in the realm of public health where laws and sanitary enforcement would produce no benefit. Only by the slow and gentle progress of popular education will our growing knowledge about cancer be made effective.

"Just at present we must learn from the laws of nature rather than attempt to prevent cancer by the legislation of man.

"Let us come back to our fractions again and see what differences there are in the performance of cancer in certain tissues or organs of the body.

"For instance, about 10 per cent of all human cancer occurs in the tongue, lips, mouth or somewhere on the skin, and since cancers in these positions are readily seen and are usually quickly noticed by the patient or his physician, they can be accurately diag-

nosed with less error than cancer of any other site, and furthermore, treatment of such surface cancers is easy, quick, and successful. Evidently there is no reason to have such cancers on one's mind, except to get suitable medical attention for any sores or lumps that develop on one's skin or in one's mouth, and see to it that competent treatment is given at once.

"To give you further confidence and encouragement you should know that education has been successful in the matter of this 10 per cent of cancer in particular, as shown by a marked reduction in the death rate from cancer of the skin and tissues about the mouth in the past twenty years, a greater fall in the rate than has occurred in any other form of cancer.

"What has been easiest to learn and act upon has shown the first practical results in cancer education, and few people nowadays ignore the returning scab upon the lip, the rough spot on the inner cheek made by a broken tooth or badly fitting dental plate or fixture, or allow the sore of syphilis on tongue or skin to go untreated, or permit the irritation of dusts or chemicals upon hands and arms, or the mechanical frictions of industrial processes against the skin of any part of the body, to continue and thus start cancer growing.

"Since 37 per cent of all cancer of women develops in the breast or on the womb or uterus, every woman must learn how to observe herself and get the physician's skill to aid her to make sure that there is no neglected beginning of lumps or sores which may be cancer at its onset.

"Unmarried women and women who have never borne or nursed a baby are subject to cancer of the breast a little more often than are those who have had the average number of children of their own, so that every woman at thirty-five and over, whether maid, wife, or widow, must have the little regular medical attention required to protect herself.

"Cancer kills each year in the United States one person in each one hundred and fifty of men and women over thirty-five years of age.

"It is with the prevention of these deaths that we are especially concerned and with those practical means of preventing even the beginning of cancer, which unless early discovered and promptly treated by X ray, radium, or surgery, leads almost certainly to death.

"There is on the whole, more cancer in large busy industrial cities than in suburban or rural communities but the difference is not very marked. Wage earners in the industrial population have somewhat more cancer than occurs among the farming population, and it is believed that the chemicals, the dusts, the frictions and the fumes of much of our manufacturing are in part responsible. Industry has done much to reduce such hazards.

"The poor have more cancer than the well-to-do, whose lives are more protected in a variety of ways.

"Lowered death rates from cancer of the outer surfaces of the body, and of the breast in women, in the past twenty years gives us confidence that medicine is on the right track and that some of the unreasoning fear of cancer will be removed by a more intelligent understanding of the conditions which give rise to it.

"At any rate, fear never prevented or cured a case or a death from cancer."

FACTS ABOUT PNEUMONIA

Of all acute diseases pneumonia is the most prevalent and fatal. As a cause of death in the United States it now exceeds tuberculosis. It occurs in all climates and is prevalent in tropical countries as well as in cold countries. It is more prevalent in the northern states of this country than in the southern states. Pneumonia shows a decided season of prevalence, as it occurs more frequently in the winter and spring months. It attacks individuals of all ages, but its incidence is most marked in infancy and in extreme old age. It occurs more frequently among males and is more highly fatal in negroes. When it attacks individuals who are physically strong, recovery generally occurs. In individuals who are physically weak and who are suffering from other disabilities, pneumonia is more often fatal. Ordinarily, pneumonia does not appear to be contagious. The pneumonococcus organism does not thrive outside of man.

While the disease sometimes occurs in epidemics, it ordinarily shows little tendency to develop in individuals who may come into contact with cases. Such outbreaks as have been recorded, have occurred in institutions, camps, on shipboard and in places where overcrowding may occur. Pneumonia is epidemic when influenza and measles are epidemic. It seems to thrive when the individuals' resistance becomes weakened through attacks of other infections. One attack does not confer immunity. In fact, increased susceptibility is more often the rule. The disease occurs often among alcoholics and develops frequently following exposure to cold and accidents. It is often found as a complication of whooping cough, typhoid fever and other infections. Overexertion, fatigue and exposure are often contributory factors in the development of pneumonia. Overcrowding, indiscretions in eating and drinking and other factors that are commonly associated with the development of common colds are constructive factors in pneumonia.

While progress has been made in the prevention of pneumonia through the use of certain biologics, the best general methods of prevention lie in the avoidance of dissipation, poor or insufficient food, lack of exercise, loss of sleep, worry, overwork, alcohol, common colds, fatigue and excesses of all kinds. Sleeping with open windows, living in rooms that are not overheated, breathing air that contains a sufficient amount of moisture, frequent baths of moderate or cold temperature and the general observance of the laws of hygiene are all important in the prevention

of the disease. Individuals who suffer from minor infections should be properly safeguarded against pneumonia. Recovery should be complete before exposure to stresses and strains that might lower individual resistance. Advances are being made in the development of effective procedures against pneumonia and it is possible that practical measures applicable to general use may soon become effective.

A. P. H. A. TO MEET IN KANSAS CITY

The 67th annual meeting of the American Public Health Association will be held in Kansas City, October 25 to 28, 1938. Work has already been started upon building the program and local committees have begun to make arrangements for the convention.

Among the organizations that will meet with the Association at Kansas City, are the following: American Association of School Physicians, Association of Women in Public Health, Conference of State Laboratory Directors, Conference of State Sanitary Engineers, American Association of State Registration Executives, Delta Omega and International Society of Medical Health Officers.

It is anticipated that there will be a large attendance from California and western states.

SANITARIANS HOLD MEETING

The National Association of Sanitarians held a business meeting and banquet in San Luis Obispo, December 11, 1937. More than 100 individuals attended the dinner. There were representatives from twenty full time health departments, and sixteen trainees from the Western School of Public Health, conducted jointly by the California State Department of Public Health and the University of California, attended.

Mr. Claude Arnold, chairman of the board of San Luis Obispo supervisors, gave the address of welcome, and the principal speaker was Senator Jespersen of San Luis Obispo County.

The following officers were elected for 1938:

President—Jack Baker, San Diego County Health Department, California.

First Vice President—L. D. Spence, San Bernardino County Health Department, California.

Second Vice President—Wm. V. Butler, Oakland City Health Department, California.

Treasurer—Chas. G. Kahlert, Los Angeles County Health Department, California.

The board of directors, composed of nine members from the States of Arizona, California, Utah and Washington, were authorized to publish an official magazine to be known as the "Sanitarian."

MORBIDITY

Complete Reports for Following Diseases for Week Ending
December 25, 1937

Chickenpox

335 cases: Alameda County 1, Alameda 3, Berkeley 2, Oakland 30, Piedmont 3, Calaveras County 7, Colusa County 1, Fresno County 17, Fresno 4, Sanger 1, Callexico 1, Kern County 8, Kings County 3, Lemoore 1, Lassen County 7, Susanville 3, Los Angeles County 18, Alhambra 7, Azusa 1, Beverly Hills 6, Covina 1, Glendale 4, Inglewood 1, Los Angeles 23, Pasadena 7, Pomona 3, Whittier 1, Monterey Park 1, Madera County 8, Gustine 4, Merced 5, Orange 1, Santa Ana 3, Laguna Beach 1, Riverside County 28, Corona 4, Hemet 4, Riverside 12, Sacramento 3, San Bernardino 1, San Diego County 7, Coronado 1, La Mesa 1, National City 6, San Diego 22, San Francisco 20, San Joaquin County 3, South San Francisco 2, Lompoc 1, Santa Barbara 13, Santa Maria 3, Santa Clara County 1, Mountain View 1, Stanislaus County 3, Modesto 1, Newman 1, Woodland 1, Yuba County 2, Marysville 7.

Diphtheria

27 cases: Oakland 1, Los Angeles County 2, Los Angeles 8, Redondo 1, Monterey 1, Riverside County 3, Sacramento County 3, Sacramento 1, San Diego County 1, National City 2, San Diego 1, Yuba City 2, Yuba County 1.

German Measles

19 cases: Alameda County 1, Berkeley 1, Kings County 1, Los Angeles County 1, Huntington Park 1, Long Beach 3, Los Angeles 2, Whittier 1, Fullerton 1, Sacramento 1, San Diego 1, San Francisco 4, California 1.*

Influenza

35 cases: Fresno County 3, Los Angeles County 5, Culver City 1, Long Beach 2, Los Angeles 17, Pasadena 1, Anaheim 1, Riverside County 1, Stockton 1, Paso Robles 2, Santa Barbara 1.

Malaria

One case: Paso Robles.

Measles

33 cases: Antioch 1, Fresno County 1, Fresno 2, Lake County 2, Lakeport 1, Los Angeles County 4, Los Angeles 4, Los Banos 5, Merced 1, Fullerton 1, Orange 1, Santa Ana 1, Riverside County 1, Corona 2, San Diego 3, San Mateo County 1, Tulare 2.

Mumps

189 cases: Alameda County 2, Berkeley 1, Oakland 9, Fresno County 7, Fresno 1, Callexico 1, Kern County 1, Bakersfield 2, Los Angeles County 19, Glendale 23, Huntington Park 1, Long Beach 1, Los Angeles 3, Santa Monica 3, South Gate 1, Madera County 2, Madera 5, Anaheim 8, Riverside County 6, Riverside 1, Sacramento 1, San Bernardino 1, San Diego County 5, San Diego 9, San Francisco 13, Redwood City 1, Santa Barbara County 3, Lompoc 2, Santa Maria 1, San Jose 1, Vallejo 1, Stanislaus County 48, Modesto 2, Oakdale 1, Turlock 2, Marysville 1.

Pneumonia (Lobar)

72 cases: Berkeley 1, Contra Costa County 1, Antioch 2, Fresno County 3, Firebaugh 1, Imperial County 1, Kern County 2, Lake County 3, Los Angeles County 5, Alhambra 1, Glendale 1, Los Angeles 15, Manhattan Beach 1, San Gabriel 1, Madera County 1, Merced 4, Soledad 1, Orange County 1, Santa Ana 1, Riverside County 1, Riverside 2, North Sacramento 1, Sacramento 3, Redlands 1, San Bernardino 1, San Diego 1, San Francisco 11, Santa Barbara County 1, Lompoc 1, Santa Barbara 1, Siskiyou County 1, Marysville 1.

Scarlet Fever

158 cases: Alameda 1, Oakland 8, San Leandro 1, Calaveras County 2, Contra Costa County 1, Antioch 1, Fresno County 2, Fresno 2, Kern County 1, Kings County 14, Lassen County 3, Los Angeles County 12, Alhambra 6, Compton 2, Long Beach 3, Los Angeles 34, Pasadena 2, Redondo 1, Whittier 1, South Gate 1, Bell 1, Madera 1, Mariposa County 3, Merced 4, Orange County 2, Anaheim 1, Fullerton 1, Santa Ana 1, Placentia 1, Tustin 1, Riverside County 8, Riverside 2, National City 1, San Diego 1, San Francisco 8, San Joaquin County 3, San Luis Obispo 1, Daly City 1, Redwood City 1, Santa Barbara 4, Santa Maria 1, Santa Clara County 1, Gilroy 1, Palo Alto 1, San Jose 2, Redding 1, Siskiyou County 1, Turlock 2, Yuba County 3, Madera County 1.

Smallpox

23 cases: Berkeley 1, Gridley 1, Kings County 12, Lemoore 9.

Typhoid Fever

9 cases: Oakland 1, Gridley 1, Los Angeles 1, Riverside County 2, San Bernardino 1, San Diego 1, Stanislaus County 1, California 1.*

* Cases charged to "California" represent patients ill before entering the state or those who contracted their illness traveling about the state throughout the incubation period of the disease. These cases are not chargeable to any one locality.

Whooping Cough

233 cases: Berkeley 4, Oakland 5, San Leandro 1, Gridley 4, Fresno County 4, Sanger 2, Kern County 8, Lemoore 1, Lake County 1, Los Angeles County 9, Culver City 1, Glendale 3, Los Angeles 27, Pasadena 3, San Fernando 1, Santa Monica 6, Whittier 1, Monterey Park 1, Madera County 3, Mariposa County 4, Monterey 2, Pacific Grove 3, Napa 1, Fullerton 4, Riverside County 4, Sacramento 14, San Diego County 7, La Mesa 3, National City 9, San Diego 25, San Francisco 31, San Joaquin County 10, Lodi 2, Stockton 6, San Luis Obispo County 2, Paso Robles 10, San Mateo County 1, Burlingame 2, Redwood City 1, Santa Maria 2, San Jose 1, Santa Clara 1, Siskiyou County 2, Stanislaus County 1.

Meningitis (Epidemic)

5 cases: Oakland 1, Colusa 1, Long Beach 1, Los Angeles 1, Riverside County 1.

Dysentery (Amoebic)

2 cases: Pasadena 1, Riverside 1.

Dysentery (Bacillary)

11 cases: Los Angeles County 2, Long Beach 1, Los Angeles 3, Pasadena 1, Tulare County 4.

Pellagra

One case: San Francisco.

Tetanus

2 cases: Los Angeles County 1, South Gate 1.

Trachoma

4 cases: Fresno 1, Reedley 1, Anaheim 1, Riverside County 1.

Trichinosis

5 cases: Berkeley 2, Santa Clara County 2, Los Gatos 1.

Food Poisoning

One case: Los Angeles.

Undulant Fever

3 cases: Azusa 1, Huntington Park 1, Siskiyou County 1.

Septic Sore Throat

2 cases: Glendale 1, Yolo County 1.

Rabies (Animal)

34 cases: Los Angeles County 8, Los Angeles 19, Pasadena 1, Santa Monica 1, South Pasadena 3, Riverside County 1, Riverside 1.

A generation or more ago, men and women commonly lived out their lives according to the die cast in the days of their youth. Training received in early years had to suffice for whatever demands might later arise. Experience, to be sure, added value. However, something was likely to be lost, for mental powers and modes of skill deteriorate through disuse. The idea of renewing or increasing one's powers in mature life was seldom entertained. Moreover, such a procedure was not supported by public sentiment. Any grown-up man who might seek some kind of schooling would have been regarded as queer. And to be thought queer was, of course, to be "in a parlous state." Nowadays, fortunately, people are coming to view these matters differently. It is no uncommon thing for a man to review, extend, and bring up to date what he has once learned, to acquaint himself with a new field of ideas, to submit himself to a new discipline, or to learn a new art. The die cast in youth does not necessarily doom one to a single, narrowing path.—Leon J. Richardson.

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